2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
Toba SI12

M 846 a few words to explain the custom with particular reference to the Chaco Indians. The primitive idea that a new-born child is especially exposed to supernatural dangers is not difficult to understand; like most savage customs it has an underlying stratum of reality. The child is naturally at the beginning of its existence in a delicate state, and as a matter of fact, the mortality among new-born children is terribly great in the Chaco as in other parts of South America where the natives live in a state of nature. The Indian from his standpoint cannot fail to ascribe such facts to supernatural causes, and therefore the ceremonies at birth assume to a great extent a magical or religious character, conjurations and similar rites playing a prominent rôle in them.

As I have already pointed out, the couvade practices are essentially founded on the idea that between the new-born child and both parents there exists an intimate connection so that everything that happens to the parents is also supposed to happen to the child. Now as far as the mother is concerned, it is not difficult to understand why primitive peoples have arrived at the belief in such an intimate connection between her and her new-born babe. Being keen observers they have undoubtedly noticed that while the mother suckles her child, her own physical and mental condition is to a certain degree reflected in her delicate offspring. VM 842 More enigmatical appears at first sight the firm conviction of the Indian as to a still more intimate connection or sympathy uniting the *father* with his new-born child. This curious idea is explained by the peculiar theory of conception which is held by the Indians. The primitive Indian does not know that the germ of the new being is in fact in the woman herself and that the man only fecundates it at the sexual act. He evidently believes that the seed springs from the man and that the rôle of the woman is limited to receiving and developing it during pregnancy, just as the earth receives the seeds planted into it and in due time brings forth the full-grown fruit. This is the idea which Professor von den Steinen found among the Xingu tribes, who regard the *man* as the bearer of the eggs, and consequently afterwards could identify the father and his new-born son, calling the child »the little father«. This idea is evidently general in South America, for instance in the Gran Chaco, and explains why the Indians consider the relationship existing between the father and his new-born son still closer than that existing between the child and its mother. T 842 There are indeed customs which so strongly emphasize the father's share in the generation of offspring, that the latter appears to be almost 847 wholly of the flesh and blood of its father. Thus among the Tobas there

a) *Conception*

831 Sperm is located in the knee. In order to cause an abun-
262 dant secretion of sperm, it is advisable to drink broth and milk and to eat chickens. It is important not to drink the broth of a bird called *čana* for the child would then be lazy. In order to have healthy children it is highly recommended that the broth of an aquatic bird called *aṣkan* be drunk;
842 The child is formed by the sperm which is assimilated into milk. The »milk» coagulates and fills up the matrix, thus do children form themselves gradually. The presence of the child in a mother's womb prevents the blood from
[843] flowing and menstruation stops. Pregnancy lasts eight months.

842 It is impossible for a man not to procreate children. Only
789 women can be sterile. Sterility may occur because the woman has been stopped up by a medicine-man, thus man's »milk» can no longer penetrate into her bosom. This may be accounted for in two ways. A woman may ask a medicine-man to make her sterile, or a bad medicine-man may make a woman sterile in order to harm her family. Sterility may be cured by a medicine-man, but the task is not easy and there are few who will attempt it.

b) *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

843 A pregnant woman works but little, she most eat sufficient, but not too much, food. The child, still in the mother's womb, sucks the food absorbed by its father and mother and if they were to eat too much the child would get fat and would be unable to come out. The husband of an expectant mother must give up certain kinds or work. He cannot use a knife or an axe for the strokes of any cutting instrument might kill or wound the child. He must not wear boots lest the child's legs be crooked. If he keeps his hat on his head the skull of the child will be flat. He must not write with ink lest the child's face be covered with marks.

114 down on the field, from the reports of excellent informants. They have been obtained in San Andres and Yuto, on the Pilcomayo river, and in San Patricio, on the river Bermejo.

Birth and Infancy

● 842 754 The child is produced by the father's seed, which germinates, as does a plant, within the mother. Sterility is always considered by the Matacos to be the mother's fault. They explain it as being an accident brought about by some witch doctor who is using magic to prevent the sperm from getting into the woman's body. It is said that some women go to a witch doctor with the express purpose of having conception prevented. The witch doctors can, furthermore, break the enchantment, although this is considered an extraordinarily difficult thing to do.

843 A pregnant woman eats moderately so that the child will not grow too large and cause difficulty at birth. The mystical bonds between father and child find their expression in a great number of "tabus." Thus, just prior to the child's birth, the father must abstain from all work that might cause the child to be deformed. He is prohibited, in particular, from using any instrument with a cutting edge (axes, knives, hoes) in order to avoid the child's coming into the world with wounds, a harelip, for instance. The father is careful not to wear sandals or shoes, in order to ensure that the infant not have one foot larger than the other. If the father should put on a hat, the upper part of [9] the child's head will be absolutely flat. The mission [212] Indians go so far as to keep from writing, fearful that the offspring be born with a wrinkled face.

If a father to be kills only male animals on the hunt, it is a sign that the child about to be born will be a male.

Precautions of various kinds are likewise taken by the women before the child's birth. They avoid girding themselves too tightly about the waist with a belt and sleeping in a position which might lead to a difficult birth. Some women make use of drugs to make sure that no accident will overtake them. To this end they take a powder made

Funeral Rites

763 If the eyes of a dying person become fixed in a stare, his soul cannot escape and his agony is prolonged. That is why the Matacos cover the faces of the dying with a piece of cloth and knot it about the throat. This cloth often contributes to accelerate the end by asphyxiating them. Their rush to bury the dead is so great that it sometimes results in the interment of persons who are still alive.

764 The widow, her head shaved, is isolated in a corner of the hut, separated from the rest of the room by a curtain, or else she is placed in a small annex attached to the hut.

[762] Immediately after the death of a young man who had committed suicide in the village of San Patricio, his mother crouched on the earth, placed the dead boy's head on her knees and began to grieve for him, saying repeatedly the word "yos," "yos" (my son, my son). The father beat a drum, day and night in accompaniment of a dirge in which the expression "yos," "yos," was much in evidence. A group of women, under the direction of the mother who was shaking a rattle [18] executed a dance which consisted of little jumpy steps near the place where the corpse had been placed before the burial.

[587] A widower or a widow may marry again two or three months after their spouse's demise. The women excuse themselves by saying: "I had to eat, I need someone who will clothe me."

Burial up in a tree, as described by Enrique Palavecino, used at one time to be very common in the middle region of the Bemejo.

Belief in the Reality of Dreams

787 842 The missionary Barbrooke Grubb has given numerous examples of the belief of the Lengua Indians in the reality of dreams. I have myself collected a good many examples of this belief among the Tobas and Pilagas. Here is an anecdote which illustrates this attitude among the Matacos. A girl from the village of San Patricio woke up weeping one beautiful morning. When asked about the cause of her sorrow, she answered that she had dreamed that she had had sexual relations with a young man and was afraid of becoming pregnant... (Footnote: Sent from the Smithsonian Institute of Washington by the author, a corresponding member. Translated from the French by Dr. Fernando Márquez Miranda, also a member).

5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7

586 [577] Laziness and incompetence are other things that often lead to divorce. If it is the woman who justly is accused of these faults she can be forced out of the house and her parents will take no counter steps. If in such circumstances there are small children in the marriage, she may be allowed to take them, but if the husband continues to send them small gifts and food he retains the right to them and gets them back at an age of 5–6, as they belong to his band. If, on the other hand, he fails to show them any attention, he loses them and may not even be allowed to play with them. Should it be the man who is lazy, his wife makes no mention of it but her parents become angry with him. One day when the man is out seeking food, the parents exhort their daughter to hide herself with some family. When the husband returns home he discovers what is going on without his in-laws saying anything to him. He also says nothing, but begins to collect his things together. He will not leave the house until nightfall, unseen, because he is ashamed, and then return to his family. It is said that this custom was far more widespread [178] a generation ago than it is now. Several women, with a smile, expressed their relief at this as "they would never manage to have any fun out of a man before he was kicked out by his in-laws, for nowadays all men are lazy".

[842] The third—and last—cause of divorce socially recognized is: childless marriages. It is always the woman who is considered to be sterile, and consequently the man who takes the initiative for divorce. However, in such cases it is he who leaves the house, presumably because he has already sought contact with a possible [587] new wife. His sister may help him to get into touch with one of her friends and let them meet secretly in the forest to discover whether they like each other. The man thus leaves the house as he falls under the rule governing unfaithful husband, and not because his wife is sterile.

[587] Whatever the reason for a Mataco divorce, it is always a heavy blow, both [589] morally and economically, for the spouse that is left. The economic loss can only be made good by re-marriage, and this nearly always takes place. Unmarried persons are reduced to living partly on the bounty of the family as occupations are so sharply divided according to sex.

762 A person who feels himself rejected or a victim of unhappy love sometimes commits suicide, which with the Mataco appears to occur particularly in this connexion and is always done in the same manner. The unfortunate one goes [278] alone into the forest and collects the very poisonous fruit of the *sacha sandia* (Capparis salicifolia), which the Indian then cooks lightly and eats. After a few hours when no remedy is possible, the Indian returns home and lies down to sleep. [682] Death comes very shortly. In cases of suicide the spouse of the dead person will always be pointed to as the one responsible. In consequence, the family of the dead person will in many cases start a campaign against that of the spouse to obtain blood vengeance or, more probably, to secure economic compensation.

182 684 628 According to Mataco unwritten law infidelity is severely punished by the loss of home and children. This should occasion no surprise, for adultery, on account